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Abraham's Bosom

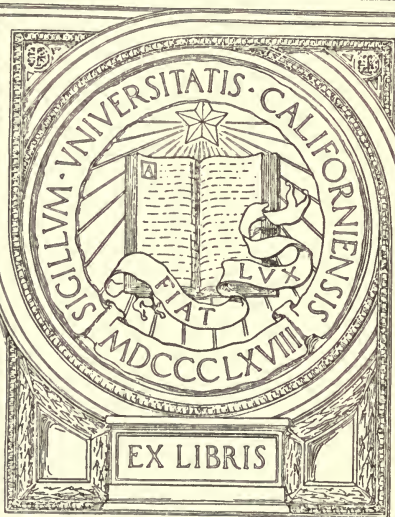
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ABRAHAM'S BOSOM

BY
BASIL KING

*Author of "THE HIGH HEART"
"THE INNER SHRINE" ETC.*



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TO VIRAL
ABRAHAM'S BOSOM

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ABRAHAM'S BOSOM

L'âme ne peut se mouvoir, s'éveiller, ouvrir les yeux, sans sentir Dieu. On sent Dieu avec l'âme comme on sent l'air avec le corps.

Oserai-je le dire? On connaît Dieu facilement pourvu qu'on ne se contraigne pas à le définir.

The soul cannot move, awake or open the eyes without perceiving God. We perceive God by the soul as we feel air by the body.

Shall I dare to say it? We know God easily so long as we do not force ourselves to define him.

—JOSEPH JOUBERT, 1754–1824.

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CHAPTER I

BECAUSE he was unaccustomed to doctors, and thought it the right thing to say, he asked the physician to name his malady frankly.

"I wish you'd tell me. I can stand it, you know."

In the bottom of his heart he was sure there was nothing to be afraid of. He was only sixty, which in the twentieth century is young, and as hale as he had been at thirty. This weakness, this sudden pain, this sense of suffocation, from which he had been suffering for the past few months, might be the beginning of a new phase in his life, the period commonly known as that of breaking up; but even so, he had good years still before him.

He could wait for the doctor's answer, then, without undue anxiety, turning toward him

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an ascetic, clean-cut profile stamped with a lifetime of high, kind, scholarly meditations.

The doctor tilted slightly backward in his chair, fitting his finger tips together, before he spoke. Any telltale expression there might have been in his face was concealed by a scraggy beard and mustache that grew right up to the edges of a lipless mouth.

"It's what is called Hutchinson's disease," he said at last. "I've known a few cases of it; but it's rather rare"—he added, as if reluctantly—"and obscure."

"But I've heard of it. Wasn't it," the patient continued, after a second's thinking, "the trouble with poor Ned Angel?"

"You mean the organist chap at Saint Thomas's—the near-sighted fellow with a limp—the one you had to get rid of?"

A sharp hectic spot like a splash of red paint came out in each of the clergyman's wax-like cheeks.

"That's the man. It—it carried him off in less than two months."

The doctor was used to embarrassing situations.

"I believe it did," he responded in a tone that seemed to make the fact of slight importance. "I remember hearing that he put

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up no fight; that he didn't want to live. You knew him better than I did—"

"I knew him very well indeed; and a sweeter soul never breathed." There seemed to be something that the rector of St. Thomas's was anxious to explain. "He'd played our organ and trained our choir for forty years—ever since the church was a little mission chapel, none too sure of its future. He was a chemist by profession, you may remember, and he'd done our work entirely without salary. But you know what American churches are. Once we'd become big and wealthy we had to have the best music money could provide; and so poor Angel had to go."

"And it killed him."

"No; I don't think so. People say it did; but I don't agree with them. It nearly killed me when I had to tell him—the parish put it up to me; but as for him he simply seemed to feel that his life on earth was over. He had fought his good fight and finished his course. That was the impression he made on me. He wasn't like a man who has been killed; he was rather like one who has been translated. He just—was not. All the same it's been a good deal on my mind; on my conscience, I might say—"

But the doctor had other patients in the

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waiting-room and was obliged to think of them.

"Quite so; and, therefore, you see that in his case there were contributing causes; whereas in yours—"

It was the patient's turn to interrupt:

"And for this Hutchinson's disease, is there any cure?"

In spite of his efforts to seem casual the doctor's voice fell.

"None that science knows of—as yet. But able men have taken it up as a specialty—"

"And its progress is generally rapid, isn't it?"

"Since you ask the question, I can only say, yes — generally. That doesn't mean, however, that in the case of a man of temperate life, like you—"

But Berkeley Noone had heard enough. He listened to what the doctor had to say in the way of advice; he promised to carry out all orders; but he was sure his death sentence had been pronounced. He took it as most men take death sentences—calmly as far as the eye could see, but with an inner sense of being stunned. Getting himself out of the office without betraying the fact that he knew he had heard his doom he roamed the city aimlessly.

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By degrees he was able to think, though thinking led no farther than to the overwhelming knowledge that he was to be cut off. Cut off in his prime were the words he used. He had never been more vigorous than in the past few years—except for those occasional spasms that latterly had come and gone, and left him troubled and wondering. They had not, however, interfered with his work, seeing that he had preached and lectured and visited his parishioners and written books as usual. Moreover, he had fulfilled his duties with a power and an authority for which no younger man would have had the experience. For another ten years, he had been reckoning, he could go on at the same pace; and now the ten years were not coming!

CHAPTER II

NEVERTHELESS, when, a few weeks later, he was confined to bed he began to see that his situation was not without advantages of which he had taken no note at first. For one thing, he was tired. He had not recognized the fact till he had kept his room a week. A day having come when he was slightly better, it was suggested that he might get up and go out. But he didn't want to. He preferred to stay where he was. His lack of zest surprised him. It surprised him still more when he crept back into bed, with the conviction that it was the spot he liked best of all. Bed by day had always fired him with impatience. Now it seemed to him a haven, delicious and remote. The world might wag in the distance, but the wagging had nothing to do with him.

Nothing to do with him when all his working life had been spent at the heart of its energies! He had wrought and fought, and struggled and suffered, and lost and won. He had been maligned and abused and mis-

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understood, and had found enemies where he might have looked for friends; and yet he had never been more himself than when in the excitement of battle. It was the less credible then that the world should have no interest for him any more, and that he should find it a relief to get away from it.

And he should get away from St. Thomas's. Six months ago he would have been angry with the man who had suggested that as a possible form of solace; and yet the fact was there. The parish had been his life. He had come to it as its first rector; his preaching had built it up. He had hardly ever taken a holiday without regulating beforehand every service and meeting that would take place in his absence. He had hardly ever come back without the sense of being just where he belonged. And now he should never again go into the pulpit and instruct other men as to what they ought to do! Never again should he make his round of calls on kindly, carping parishioners! He should not have to take the respectful admonitions of his vestry any more, or try to appease its members, or defend himself for writing books. All that was over. He sank back among his pillows, with a sigh of comfort. He should get away from it.

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Later he made a discovery that astonished him and gave him pain. He should get away from his wife.

A little thing revealed this, too, as an escape. Emily had hustled into his bedroom with a cup of broth. She liked plenty of salt in her broth, and he very little; but it was one of those small differences of taste to which she had never become reconciled. It fretted her that he shouldn't know when things were as they ought to be; and, not to fret her, he had during two-and-thirty years submitted to her wishes docilely. But to-day he felt privileged to put up a mild protest.

"Isn't there too much salt in this broth, dear?"

Standing by his bedside, she took the cup and tasted it.

"No, darling. It's very good indeed. I seasoned it myself. It's exactly right."

"Thanks, dearest." As broth exactly right, he forced himself to swallow it.

Having relieved him of the cup she went on to make him comfortable. He had been comfortable as it was, but she didn't believe it. She had always declared that if he would only rest as she did he would get more repose. She proceeded, therefore, to show him how, as she had shown him how perhaps a million

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times in the course of their life together. Patiently he allowed himself to be pulled and shunted while the sheets were straightened and the pillows smoothed, and he composed his figure to the lines that suited hers. Patiently, too, he pretended to be more at ease than he had been before, though he was saying to himself, with some eagerness, that death would take him away from this worrying wifely affection which never let him alone.

The anticipation gave him pangs of conscience, since they had lived together with quite the average degree of happiness, and he loved her with a deep and quiet love. Moreover, in spite of her double chin and her increase in waist-line, he had never ceased to see in her the timid, wild-eyed nymph of a thing who had incarnated for him all that was poetry in the year when he was twenty-eight. Not till after their first child was born had her bird-like shyness yielded by degrees to an assumption of authority, which in the end became a sort of lordship over him. By the time they had had three children she had formed the habit of correcting the thousand and one small faults into which he fell without knowing it. The way he ate; the way he sat at table; the

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way he held a book; the way he coughed; the way he yawned; the way he shook hands; the way he pronounced certain of his words; the way he gave out his notices in church; the way he allowed other men to walk over him—these, with a hundred similar details, had become the sphere of her loving, conjugal discipline.

For more than twenty of their thirty-two years of married life her comments on his oddities had trickled on like a stream that flows and stops, and stops and flows, and never dries up entirely. He had borne it all because she could at any time, even now, throw him that look of the startled dryad which touched some hidden spring in him; but the moment had arrived when he couldn't help saying that he would be glad to get away from it.

And then, as his children roamed back one by one to see him die, it came to him that he should be glad to get away from them. That was a discovery which shocked him to the core. His children had been part of himself. They had been good children, too—on the whole. There were five of them, and their ages ran from thirty-one to twenty-two. From a worldly point of view they were all doing reasonably well—and yet they were

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doing reasonably well in ways that never turned to him for sympathy.

Berkeley, Junior, was a broker in New York, and lived on Staten Island with a wife and a baby son. He seldom came home now, except for a wedding or a funeral. The father had had hopes for something more brilliant for the lad in the year when he was born; hopes that had grown with the boy's growth and followed him to school and college, only to fade when the young man struck out for himself.

Then there was Constantia, who had been such a wonderful little girl. Beauty and cleverness had been her portion, with a command of the piano that had promised the career of a Carreño. But she had married an agnostic professor in a Western state university, where, owing to the necessity of doing her own housework, she had given up her music, while in submission to her husband's teaching she refused to let her children be baptized.

The twins, Herbert and Philip, were in modern phases of business, the one selling agricultural implements in Texas, the other automobiles in Detroit. There was nothing a father could complain of in this. Berkeley Noone would not have so much as sighed if it

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hadn't been for his hopes. They had been such angelic little boys, and so quick at everything! He had placed them in the ideal walks of life; one perhaps as a historian or philosopher, and one—one at least—as a clergyman. But they had preferred the great career of making money, and, like their elder brother, rarely came home nowadays.

Beatrice was the enigmatic one. Though but twenty-two, she was restless and eager, and sometimes unhappy in ways as to which she never gave her mother or himself her confidence. Nominally living at home, she was oftener than not away on the pretext of studying art. All he knew of her with certainty was that she moved in the advanced brigade of the woman's agitation, that she had extraordinary friendships with young men, and that she smoked a great many cigarettes. Affectionate enough, but wilful and mysterious, it pleased her to keep her parents in ignorance as to her doings, once she had closed their door behind her.

If his offspring had disappointed him it was not precisely disappointment that had worn him out; it was a sense of the futility of bringing children into the world at all. He had put his strength into theirs and they

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hadn't needed it. So long as they had let him, he had lived their lives with them, and shared their struggles, and suffered their pains; he had yearned and longed and looked forward for them more than they had ever yearned and longed and looked forward for themselves. He had seen them all as children of destiny! Whatever they might become, they could never be commonplace! Even when they had crosses to carry and cares to endure, their places in life could never be anything but high ones! And now—now they were all there, each absorbed in what seemed to him a merely starveling way of life, waiting for him to die in order that they might return to it as quickly as steam and electricity could carry them. Vitally and essentially he was no more to them than the parent bird to the robin that has mated and made its nest in another tree.

So he gave up his yearnings over them. As they came and went in his room he watched them with the same detachment they betrayed toward him. He would have said he had outlived them had he ventured to use a word in which life was a compound. Certainly there was a sense in which he had outgrown them. He had left them behind in some race that had more than death for its

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goal. The effort to keep going back to them, going back and pulling them along, was too wearisome to keep up.

In the place for which he was bound he would get rest from the cravings on their behalf that had haunted him ever since the minute when he knew the first of them was to be born.

CHAPTER III

AND yet his thoughts were not all of rest. Far from it! He was of Puritan stock and traditions. Though in later life he had abandoned that belief in an angry God in which his childhood had been nursed, something of the early teaching clung to him. Won as he had been by the modern doctrine of eternal hope, he still lapsed into moments when death became to him, in biblical phrase, "a certain fearful looking for of judgment."

He had been a great sinner. Though no one knew it but himself, a great sinner he had been. He had preached to others, and warned them, and consoled them, and prepared them for death, and had passed as a man of God; and no one suspected the depths of evil that lay beneath the dignified surface of his life. There had been wicked thoughts, hasty words, carnal desires, envies, antipathies, doubtings, angers, rashnesses, and everything else that makes a man's inner life something which he hides from others, and that often appals himself.

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This was true even of his later life. And when he went back to his earlier manhood, to his youth, to his boyhood, to his childhood—

There were nights when the cold sweat broke out all over him as he thought of these things. In a few days now—in a fortnight or three weeks at furthest—he would have to give an account of all that was recorded against him. When the Throne was set and the Books were opened he might be blasted forever under the Judge's keen, all-seeing glance. That glance itself would be the worm that dieth not and the fire that never should be quenched.

But he had other moments of exalted and somewhat desperate trust in a redeeming love that had paid the penalty for these offenses and won their forgiveness. He was not very clear as to how this vicarious atonement could ever have been made; but since the thought of it was all there was to cling to he did his best to cling to it. He repeated hymns and prayers and passages of Scripture as he had repeated them at the bedsides of men and women who had been facing the crisis he was facing in his turn. He told himself he was comforted; he almost persuaded himself that he was; and yet at the back of

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his mind there lay the suspicion of a mere self-administered spiritual drug.

So day by day he receded from the world, from his work, from his wife from his family and from all that had formed his interests, seemingly making that peaceful end for which those who cared for him watched and prayed. But inwardly he was like a man sweating blood. Death was abhorrent to him. There were minutes when he could have doubted the goodness of a God who had foreordained it. What was the good of birth and effort and love if they could only end in this? There was the great question with which he wrestled as he had never wrestled with anything before.

He reminded himself of One who said, "If a man keep my saying, he shall never taste of death." But for sinners like himself there was nothing in the promise, or in any promise similar; and there never had been. He should have to taste of death. He should have to eat its last morsel and drink its last dregs. Hutchinson's disease had got him by as many tentacles as the octopus gets its victim. It was swathing him round, and dragging him down, and darkening his intelligence. He was going the way of all flesh. His wife would come after him, and their children after them, and their children after

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them; and so on till the globe collapsed. What was the good of it? What was the good of it? Why could not the All-intelligent, if there was such a Being, have given man a life that wouldn't have to come to this miserable wreckage?

These were his thoughts as he waited for his last agony. That it was expected soon he judged by the way in which the doctor shook his head, and his wife relaxed her bustling to watch him with tearful eyes. Two or three times a day the boys tiptoed into the room, gazed at him with solemn, sympathetic faces, and tiptoed out again. Beatrice cried in corners, and Constantia helped the nurse when her mother was obliged to rest.

Practically they had taken their farewell of him; but there came a day when they did it in actual fact. It was a bright summer afternoon, with the sunshine streaming in at all the windows. The nurse had given the sign by summoning Emily; Emily had called Constantia; and Constantia, Beatrice and the boys. They all kissed him, and stood or sat about the bed, his wife holding one hand and Phil the other. He hardly knew by what signs they judged, since he felt but little weaker than on other days and not much more pain. They seemed to know, however,

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that the time had come; and to treat him a little like the jailers and sheriffs who notify the condemned that the supreme minute is approaching.

He could only let them do as they thought right, fixing his eyes somewhat vacantly on a picture which had long hung at the foot of his bed, and which was a favorite. It was a steel engraving of Holman Hunt's "Light of the World," purchased on his honeymoon, after Emily and he had seen the original at Oxford. Neither of them had been expert critics of painting, but they had stood together and spoken of the light thrown out by the lantern in the Saviour's hand as one of the most beautiful things they knew. For the figure and face they had not cared. They had cared for nothing but that light. For him, if not for her, it had remained a lasting memory. He had been able to see it in the steel engraving's black-and-white splotch during all the intervening years, and to identify its glow with England and Oxford, and young love and his soul's striving.

And he saw it now. It was odd—but he did. It positively burned in the lantern. He was glad of the illusion, because it helped him, he thought, to get nearer the last minute without knowing it. It would come, of

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course—that last minute. There would be an instant, perhaps in half an hour, when his soul would tear its way out of his body and he should be thrust, a naked, quivering bundle of spiritual nerves, before angels and arch-angels and principalities and powers, and a God whose first question would be that which was put to Cain: “What hast thou done?” If, then, he was not to hear the sentence, “Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire,” it would only be because there had been a cross on Calvary. Mentally he clung to that cross as he watched the light grow brighter and brighter in the lantern in the print.

He was dimly conscious of a man he knew, a brother clergyman who had administered the last sacrament to him on the previous day, coming into the room and kneeling at his bedside. Dimly he was conscious that the family knelt down and that there were prayers. They were prayers that came to him as if from such a long way off as hardly to reach his ear. When the murmur of “Our Father” traveled up it was like a rumble from a world below him. He tried to join in it; but he couldn’t keep his mind on the phrases. He couldn’t keep his mind on the phrases because of the shining of the light. It was

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becoming an amazing light, bursting the limits of the lantern, making glory of the figure, making beauty of the face, turning the crown of thorns into jewels, and throwing a sunshine brighter than the sunshine on the wall.

It was a pleasant illusion, he told himself—the action of the self-administered spiritual drug he distrusted and yet relied on. At any rate, it made things easier. It gave him a sense of relief that might even be called physical. He noticed, all at once, that his pain was gone. That, of course, was illusion, too—probably no more than the end of his power to feel; but the iron claws that Hutchinson's disease had dug into his flesh had loosened their grip. He was breathing easily for the first time in months. Had he not known that he couldn't really be better, he would have been tempted to say he was well. He would have been able to get up; only that it was so delicious to lie there seemingly free—he reminded himself that it could be no more than seemingly free—from torture, and with his mental burdens gone. What had dispelled them he didn't know; but it was a fact that they had rolled away.

CHAPTER IV

“THIS is rest!” he murmured to himself.
A voice answered him promptly:

“Yes; it’s rest, because you’re now beginning to realize as a fact what you’ve always taken as no more than a lovely spiritual image—that underneath are the everlasting arms.”

He was not surprised at the voice. Familiar with the fancies of the dying, he knew to what to ascribe it. He reminded himself that he must hold on to his senses till he was deprived of them, and so made no effort to reply.

Instead, he watched the spreading of the light that flooded the room and glorified its occupants. Wife and son and daughter were all beside him; but in that light they were different. They were also doing things he didn’t clearly understand. All he knew was that he felt toward them an extraordinary tenderness, and that something similar came from them to him.

“I suppose this must be dying,” he said to

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himself, as he noticed that the new day had blotted out the sunlight.

"No," came the voice again; "because there's no such thing as death."

To Berkeley Noone, this was the real point at issue. It was worth taking up, even if only in delirium.

"Of course there's no such thing as death from the spiritual point of view—"

"And there is no other."

"I know there'll be no other in the next life; but—"

"But there's no next life. There's only one life."

"In a sense—yes," he admitted, not without a shadow of impatience. "And yet I'm—I'm dying."

"No; you're only waking—waking from the deep sleep that fell on Adam and on all Adam's so-called children."

He fixed his attention on but one of these points:

"Why do you say so-called?"

"Because they're only the offspring of a dream."

"I don't see how they can be the offspring of a dream when a dream is nothing—"

"Pardon me; a dream is something—while it lasts. It's only seen to be nothing

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when we wake and know it for what it was."

"And do you mean to tell me that all my past life has had no reality?"

"Not all your past life; only whatever in it may have been evil, mortal, or unhappy. Once we've thrown off that, we come to our genuine birthright. You're probably able to prove it by some heightening of your faculties already."

"Do you mean the light I see from the picture at the foot of my bed?"

There was genuine curiosity in the tone:

"Won't you tell me what it's like?"

He complied with this request. The voice continued:

"That's very like my own experience—only that in my case the increase of perception was in the way of what our mortal senses call sound. You were with me at the time, and may remember."

"I?"

"According to the reckoning of time it was in June over a year ago. The day was close and the windows were open. The noises of the street came up to my room rather distressingly. I tried not to listen to them or be annoyed by them; but it was beyond me. Then by degrees all such noises merged into

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something else—into music—into floods of music—into floods on floods of music; and I was made to understand that in the Reality there is no such thing as ugly sound; that it's only the senses of the Man of Dust that degrade to harshness and discord that which in itself is harmonious and lovely."

With some surprise Berkeley Noone became aware that behind the voice there was a personality. Timidly he asked the question:

"Aren't you Angel?"

The answer came with what he would hitherto have called a smile. It struck him now as an effulgence:

"The name will do for the present. You and I are still within the sphere of mortal thought—you, of course, more than I; but we shall work away from it."

Among the questions Berkeley Noone was eager to ask, one presented itself as most pressing to his curiosity. It stood for years of speculation, wonder, and hope.

"Then," he began, still timidly, "you're really able to come back and be with us—here in my room?"

There was a repetition of what seemed to him an effulgence.

"You must remember that what you call your room is only a phase of mortal con-

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sciousness. It's one of the expedients by which the Man of Dust makes use of his limitations. Being finite himself he can think only in terms of spaces and walls and tables and chairs, which he sees to stand for other ideas as soon as he begins to see at all. What you've said of the new light makes a very good illustration."

"But that's only the illusion of a dying man."

"It's more than that. It's the point by which your waking thought catches on to actuality. What you've seen in your picture hitherto has not been what was there; it was what the Man of Dust put there as the best he could do. It's been a sheet of white paper with some printing in black; but it was as much as the eye of Dust could see. Your mind, on the other hand, got hold of the immortal conception when your mortal vision was blind to it."

"And by the immortal conception you mean—"

"We'll see that if we go back to your picture. Jesus spoke of Himself as the Light of the World; but He never meant that He was such a light as mortal discovery draws from electricity. He was a light in consciousness. As a light in consciousness He

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has appeared to every generation since He uttered the words. As a light in consciousness the artist saw Him, even though he himself couldn't get beyond canvas and paint. But it was the light in consciousness that appealed to the engraver who copied the work, and through him to you. The engraver was trying to give you some of that light, and some of it you got. Now you're getting more of it. You haven't it all, by any means; but you can see for yourself that you've made a long step forward from paper and ink. You'll find that ever to be making new and beautiful discoveries, and yet never to exhaust them, is one of the joys of the new condition."

Berkeley Noone returned to the point he had raised before.

"What interests me most is that the departed can really come back—"

A ripple in the effulgence might have corresponded to laughter.

"But there are no departed. Absence and presence are states of consciousness. When you've learned more of infinity you'll see that it's so. I've been with you ever since what you called my death, and you've been with me."

There was here new matter for surprise.

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"I've been with you? I confess I don't understand—"

"You've been with me in the sense in which a sleeping man is with the waking one who sits beside him and watches. You've been dreaming of me—"

"I've been thinking of you—a good deal—if that's what you mean."

"The expression will pass. And, as we've been so much in each other's thoughts, I happen to be the one with whom you can most easily come into touch, now that—"

"But I don't see you."

"You don't see me partly because, if I may go on using mortal terms, you've never seen anything in your life." Before a protest could be expressed, the voice continued: "Though the Man of Dust knows he never sees anything farther off than a reflection on the retina of the eye of Dust—a reflection turned upside down, and which he has always to be correcting mentally—he rarely stops to consider that. He talks of seeing; he persuades himself that he sees. Knowing that, strictly speaking, you were blind, you, nevertheless, taught yourself to think that a mere reflection was Edward Angel, when, as a matter of fact, I was something else."

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"If you were something else—what were you?"

"You'll know that as you go on. At present let me say that I was not the short-sighted fellow, with a limp, who played the organ at Saint Thomas's. He was the illusion of the Man of Dust. He saw me, he made me see myself, with infirmities that never existed, except in the mind of Dust."

"But even the mind of Dust, as you call it, can take cognizance of—"

"It can take cognizance of nothing but in corrupting facts and disfiguring them. The Man of Dust has no faculty for understanding things as they are, otherwise than remotely."

It suited Berkeley Noone to argue, since the process dulled his anticipation of the last event. It annoyed him somewhat that the bases of existence, as he had always conceived of it, should be so radically called into question. He seized, therefore, on what seemed to him an admission.

"But remotely, your Man of Dust can understand?"

"Doesn't your present experience answer that? You have seen the 'Light of the World' as clearly as it could be transmitted to you through canvas and paint or through

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paper and ink. Now you're looking at it more nearly as it is."

"But you allow that I've seen it already to some degree?"

"If you hadn't seen it already to some degree you wouldn't be getting this fuller conception of it now. Light is one of the most radiant symbols we have for God; and all through the ages of time men have loved darkness. Those who love darkness must go on in darkness till they win out to a glimmer of perception. Those who love Light inherit it. There are no leaps and bounds in life. What mortals call death takes them where it finds them—as every day and hour does the same. If through the mortal years you hadn't been working away from mortality—"

"I should still be seeing in the 'Light of the World' no more than the engraver could show me. I shouldn't have reached what you call the immortal conception. I think I follow you." He harked back to the consideration he thought not to have been fully met. "And yet I don't understand why, if I can see the 'Light of the World,' I can't, for example, see you."

"Aren't you still keeping too close to Dust conceptions? Aren't you forgetting that in the Dust condition you were blind?"

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You never got beyond your own eyeball. You never really saw a person or an object of any kind. Before you could think so, you had to learn a whole series of Dust conventions. You had to be taught shapes and colors and distances and comparative sizes, and come to an agreement with other Men of Dust that a bed was a bed and a chair was a chair, when in reality you didn't know what they were."

"I knew a chair was a chair by sitting in it, and that a bed was a bed by lying down."

"Did you? What are you lying in now?"

"Am I not lying in my—"

But the sentence died on his lips. When he sought for his bed, with its pillows and its sheets, he found something else.

"Well?"

The word was accompanied by a renewal of the quiver of amusement in the radiance.

Berkeley Noone answered very slowly:

"My bed—seems to be—a wonderful—comforting — sustaining — knowledge that—that I am—supported."

"And isn't that what I told you at first—that it's positively a fact that underneath are the everlasting arms? The Man of Dust takes these eternal truths and makes them temporary, material, destructible. For

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inexhaustible sustenance, protection, and supply he uses as his symbols trivial things, like tables and beds and walls and floors, and food to eat and money to spend. In the very act of yearning for the actual he contents himself with a falsification, just as a child who grasps at the moon can be satisfied with a tinsel toy. Sight, which is an attribute of Infinite Intelligence, he locates in a blind material physique; and, even while admitting his mistake, he goes on making it."

Berkeley Noone endeavored to show the mortal impulse as less culpable than it was represented.

"And yet we Men of Dust, as you call us, admit that we see with the intelligence. We don't merely speak of seeing with the eye. One of our commonest expressions is, I see!—as applied to comprehension."

"Which goes to prove what I've been telling you. The Man of Dust is rarely without some gleam of true understanding. It has to be remembered that the mist which, as mortals saw for themselves in the book of Genesis, went up from the earth is less dense in some places than it is in others; that the deep sleep which fell on Adam is a restless sleep. At times the Man of Dust is haunted by nightmare;

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he exists in a delirium of terror and pain. At times he is so nearly awake as to catch a glimpse of the blissful and peaceful reality. In his music, for instance, and all his arts; in goodness and all high thoughts; in love and compassion, and learning and knowledge, and every honest pursuit, he sees some ray of that reality which you're beginning to perceive as you never did before; and he strains toward it."

"So that when a man says I see!—in the sense that he understands—he puts himself on a higher plane than when he merely tells himself he sees with the physical senses."

"You must be getting that conviction for yourself. It must be growing plainer to you that mortal intelligence is less deceptive than the mortal senses. The mortal eye, like everything else that is made of Dust, is poorly adapted to its purposes. Assuming that it ever sees more than an inverted reflection, its range is still limited; and within that range it is subject to a thousand errors and infirmities. The mortal intelligence, being nearer akin to actual Intelligence, is less liable to error, even though it errs. Man only sees when he sees altogether through the mind; and it is in mind only that I shall see you and you will see me."

CHAPTER V

BERKELEY NOONE withdrew from communication with his invisible companion in order to assimilate some of these ideas. In his effort to cling to his faculties, as he called it, he put it plainly to himself that he was in a state betwixt reality and dream-land. The very clarity of his mind was like that produced by some mighty stimulant. It was one of the phases of dying he had heard about; but it was at least a pleasant phase, putting the evil moment a little further off. Meantime he watched his wife and children with renewed perplexity.

It puzzled him that, while he was lying at the very point of death, they should apparently be going and coming on errands not directly connected with himself.

A few minutes ago his wife was holding his right hand and Phil his left.

Each of the others was watching him, as he was watching them, with eyes of piteous farewell. He might have supposed that, for the rest of the time he stayed

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with them, they would have no other pre-occupation.

But now they seemed bent on obeying some lord who was not death. Moreover, in the "Light of the World," they continued to undergo a transfiguration he could neither describe nor define. They were themselves but themselves glorified. Emily was again the dryad of their youthful days; but a dryad with ways of light and tenderness he had never known her to possess. Each of the children was bathed in the same beautifying radiance. He knew them—and yet he didn't know them. All he could affirm of them exactly was that his doubts and worryings and disappointments on account of them were past. He felt what Angel had just been telling him, that he was waking from some troubled dream on their behalf. The boys were not sordid; Beatrice was not wilful; Constantia was not a renegade to her God. That he should ever have thought so began to seem to him incomprehensible.

Angel spoke, as if there had been no interruption:

"It's because mortals never see each other, except as wearing grotesque masks, behind which the true and normal features are hidden. The Dream Man may catch the

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shadow of God's Man; but he never beholds him as he is. He invents another Dream Man. The Dream Man is to God's Man no more than the reflection in the hollow of a silver spoon to the face it is supposed to give back."

Once more Berkeley Noone was quick to seize a point that made for mortal reality:

"But there is a face there."

"Oh, yes; there is a face there. The Man of Dust never creates anything. He only takes what God has created and distorts it. His senses have about the same degree of accuracy as wind-swept water, which shows the objects standing above it not only upside down but quivering, broken—a succession of shadows that appear and disappear and reappear, and have no stability."

"But your Man of Dust has intelligence; he has power. Look at his development through the ages; look at his discoveries, his inventions, his mastery of the elements."

"You mean that he has his approaches to actuality. True! There are spots where he so penetrates the mist that it grows very thin. His great advances are in the direction of truth. His use of steam, of electricity, of the Hertzian waves, brings him nearer to things as they are; and so nearer to God.

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It's one of his limitations that he can only think of coming nearer to God ethically. He sees God in His relation to moral right and wrong, and he hardly ever sees Him in any other way. He practically never takes the telephone, for instance, or the motor-car, as his demonstration of God's power. He looks upon them as his own discoveries or inventions, having nothing to do with God; and so directs his advantages not to good ends but to evil."

While Berkeley Noone was considering a response to this, Angel's voice, after a brief pause, went on:

"How are the Children of Dust making use of the knowledge they've gained during the last fifty years of their counting? Is it to help one another? Is it to benefit themselves? Is it to make the world happier, or more peaceful, or more prosperous? Haven't they taken all their new resources, all their increased facilities, all their approximations to Truth, all their approaches to God—the things which belonged to their peace, as Jesus of Nazareth called them—and made them instruments of mutual destruction? Aren't they straining their ingenuity to devise undreamed-of methods for doing one another harm?

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"You think me harsh toward them; but can you consider for a moment their colossal stupidity and not be harsh? Isn't it fair to say of the carnal mind that its promptest use of a blessing is to turn it into a curse? Is there any good thing that it has not, at one time or another, so perverted that it becomes difficult to see what useful end it was meant to serve? Isn't it a fact that the most beautiful things in mortal existence—the love of husband and wife, for instance, or the affection of parent and child—are so wrested by the carnal mind from the purposes for which they were ordained that they become the causes of misery?"

Berkeley Noone having reluctantly admitted this, the quiet voice pursued its line of reasoning:

"The best that can be said of the carnal point of view is that it doesn't last. The Man of Dust is fully aware that he has only a brief day. From the beginning he foresees his end. Dust he is, and to Dust he must return. He can pervert the facts for no more than threescore years and ten, or fourscore years—or a hundred years at most. Knowing that, he keeps his worst error in reserve."

"And his worst error is—"

"The invention of death."

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"Ah, but is death an invention? Isn't it the most real of all realities? Here am I, a dying man—"

"Everything is real to which we lend reality. It has just the reality we lend to it. The Man of Dust persuades himself that his return to his natural nothingness is the most fearful form of destruction. He frightens his children into the belief that, with the passing of delusion, something vital in them ends. He calls into existence a hundred bogies—a future life, another world, a hades, a purgatory, a hell. Even of a heaven he turns the lofty spiritual imagery of John, in the Revelation, into a tedious, useless materiality. He stops at nothing that will add terror to man's blessed waking from his night of phantasms. You yourself were probably not free from some alarms, any more than I."

The thought that had been forming in Berkeley Noone's mind now burst from him with extreme intensity of awe:

"But am I—am I—dead?"

Again there was that dancing of the radiance which might have represented laughter.

"How can you be dead when there is no death? Do you think yourself dead?"

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He sought another way of putting it:

"Then—then—has the great change taken place?"

"There's been no great change to take place—for you. All your life you've been doing your best to throw off mortality; and now you're succeeding. That's all! As for a great change—well, that's for those who still remain in the mortal state. They are saying you're dead; but you best know whether you are or not."

In the enlarged consciousness, amazement struggled with relief. It was the latter that triumphed as he asked, incredulously:

"But is it—is it—over?"

"Haven't you been looking for a shock, when life, as we know it, has nothing but sweet and gentle transitions?"

Berkeley Noone was still unable to convince himself.

"But how can I be"—unable to find any other, he used the word again—"how can I be dead when I'm still in my room, with my family?"

"You mean that you haven't fully abandoned your mortal point of view. That will come by degrees. Even as it is, you see some things differently, don't you?"

This could not be denied. As Berkeley

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Noone looked about him—if looking was the word—he began to note a transmutation of all the things with which he had been familiar. It was true of them, as of the members of his family, that they were the same, yet not the same. If he could have found words to describe his new perceptions he would have said that he was getting to the inner essence of objects of which he had hitherto known but the surfaces. Mortal symbols had, on the whole, been well enough, so far as they went; they had only been inadequate. They had been inadequate and, as he found himself able to observe, unsatisfying. They had been unsatisfying because they brought tremendous truths down to the temporary or the trivial.

He found himself moving about the well-known chamber. Everything was around him that he had known of old; objects he had once possessed but had lost or otherwise parted with seemed also to be his again; and yet each thing was there with a significance he had never supposed to be inherent in workaday bits of furniture. He had already seen his bed melt into a knowledge of support; his arm-chair was now an assurance of rest, with its complement of strength.

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Where there had been his bedroom desk, with papers and pens, and the paraphernalia of a busy life, there was the promise of activity. The floor became a sense of the solidity of his new condition; and the wall a guaranty of privacy, of independence, of a place for him as an individual in an infinite world of work.

Whatever had been matter he saw as thought; but thought which, nevertheless, projected a new type of objectivity. The rugs were thoughts; the pictures were thoughts; each tiny trifle, useful or useless, as the case might be, represented some eternal, indestructible idea. A few rows of books, some of which he had not taken from their shelves for years, were a thronging variety of thoughts, glowing, glorious, crowding one another, and yet making room for one another, like jewels in a treasury or flowers in a field.

It was his bedroom. He had no doubt of that. It was the intimate environment his needs and tastes had created, and which expressed him. But it was to be his forever. It was not a spot he had been allowed to love and permitted to rest in, and from which he was to be torn away. There had been no such futility to life; no such lack of

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purpose in its development. What he had gathered he was to keep; what he had cared for he was to continue to enjoy. The dear familiar things that the Man of Dust had told him could be his but for a little while were to abide with him—not only as the medium through which his spirit had worked outward, but as an earnest of security.

He could hardly tell by what means he apprehended this, or whether the physical senses were still at his command or not. He could not have said whether sight and hearing had become amplified, or whether they had yielded to some higher method of perception. He was like a new-born child, so abundantly endowed with gifts that as yet he is incapable of appraising any one of them. He could only perceive—and enjoy. He could only enjoy—and delight in the knowledge that he was beyond the range of vicissitude.

Love and its blessings were not to be snatched away from him. The past, with its ties and its kindly, simple associations, had not been lived through in vain. He was not to be wrenched from them abruptly, or sent to strange spiritual countries, where even the highest pleasures would be alien. He was merely living on; living on with heightened powers, doubtless, and with a

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more exact valuation of men and things—but living on.

It ceased to be a question in his mind as to whether he was still within his room or not, because space, as he had known it, no longer had significance. Words like “where” and “when” began to give up their meaning. That which was vital to the past being his forever, conditions of time and place did not arise. All the taxed and tired recesses of his being, so worn with the struggle against chance and change and mortal fear, could rest.

“After all,” Angel answered to these reflections, “rest is humanity’s primary craving. It asserts itself above all demands for joy or power. Just as the infant’s capacity for sleep is beyond any other of its functions, so to those emerging from mortality the mere knowledge of safety is a reason for taking that perfect, delicious repose which the Man of Dust never permits to himself or to his children. It isn’t sleep, for the reason that the true mind never has to relax. But not to have to be afraid any more! . . . Never again to have to worry or be anxious, or to fret oneself! . . . He who comes where at last he sees this finds nothing so blissful as just to rest and rejoice.”

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So Berkeley Noone rejoiced and rested. It was occupation enough, it was happiness enough, to be getting the true meaning of his past. The knowledge that life was not the fleeting thing it had always been described to him, that it had everlasting values, was in itself a satisfaction of which his spirit took long draughts. All that was good and useful and honest and well-intentioned remained as a perpetual inheritance. He returned to the fact again and again. There was only one life, as Angel had told him; there was only one world. No sudden transplanting made a shadow of the one, and no violent breaking-off a monstrosity of the other. He lived and saw; he lived and knew; he saw and knew and lived. He lived with the old things he had always lived with, discovering only their full uses; he lived with the old ties, learning only their stability and permanence; he lived with the old duties, perceiving only that as he would fulfil them thenceforth in higher ways they would lead to higher issues.

And as he thought of higher issues another question arose in his mind. It was a startling question:

“If I’m dead, why don’t I—see God?”

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Angel's voice replied, as though the words had been actually spoken:

"Aren't you seeing Him?"

"Why, no!"

"Why not? What did you expect to see?"

Before this simple inquiry Berkeley Noone was dumb. When he tried to formulate his hope it was brokenly.

"I've always understood that—that I should be taken before the Great White Throne; and that, high and lifted up—"

"You'd see a supernal Man, or three supernal Men, taking great delight in an adoring chorus from a white-robed throng?" A pause preceded the next words, like a pause of reflection. "'The letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life,'" the unseen companion quoted. "There have been few for whom John didn't write the book of his Revelation quite in vain. It has been the conviction of the Man of Dust that if he didn't see a reflection turned upside down on the retina of Dust he didn't see at all. He has persuaded himself that he lives in a world where God is invisible, when, as a matter of fact, even he, with his Dust limitations, is always seeing Him."

"Oh, but I haven't been always seeing

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Him," Berkeley Noone began to plead. "If I had—"

"You've been seeing Him and you didn't know it. Go back to what we said as to sight being not the action of a temporary optic nerve, but essentially the power to understand. We see God by what we understand of Him; we understand Him by His attributes; and we measure His attributes by their beauty and goodness and practicality. Wherever there has been a blessing for you to enjoy, you've seen God. Whenever love has cheered you or kindness helped you, you've seen God. In sunrise and sunset and moonlight and starlight, and trees and fields and harvest and flowers and ice and snow and air, and health and beauty, and generosity and friendship, and all that gives pleasure to existence, you've seen God. He hasn't been invisible. There is not one world in which God is seen and another world in which He is not. There is not a life with God and another life away from Him. There is only one world, and God fills it; there is only one life, to which God is All-in-All."

"And yet we speak of the Unseen—"

"The Man of Dust speaks of it; and, to make him understand, it may sometimes be

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necessary to employ his terms. He has other such expressions, too, in his vocabulary. He has a beyond the veil, and a beyond the clouds, and a beyond the tomb, and a dozen other misleading tokens. But there is no Beyond. There is only a universal Here! There is only an ever-present Now! 'No man hath ascended up to heaven,' " Angel quoted again, "'but He that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven.' To the true Son of man, who is also the true Son of God, heaven is not another world or an afterworld; it's the only world. It's a state of consciousness He never leaves and of which He never loses the assurances. He has the highest authority for knowing that in it His angels do always behold the face of His Father.' "

"His angels—yes; but that doesn't necessarily mean Himself."

"Doesn't it? What are angels? Aren't they messengers? Aren't they messages? And haven't you always been sending your messages and messengers straight to Him? In yearnings and prayers and aspirations and hopes, and a thousand other impulses of your being, what have you been doing but sending troops of your angels to see His face? Abandon the inverted reflection on

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the mortal retina as a necessity for sight—and you see Him at once.”

“So you would say that in my present more accurate knowledge of things as they are—”

“You are seeing God as you’ve always seen Him, even though not so radiantly as now. What more remains is not for me to say, since I am doing only that much myself. All I can affirm is what Jesus of Nazareth affirmed, that to know God is eternal life, and that they who possess even the rudiments of that knowledge shall never and can never die. What the end of that knowledge shall be surpasses our capacity to guess at, as God Himself surpasses it. For the present we are the inheritors of love, joy, and peace; and in proportion as we have them—whatever the stage of our progress out of material beliefs—we see at least the fringe of the robe of Him whose qualities they are.”

Thus, to Berkeley Noone the Vision of God began to unfold itself. He was seeing where he had supposed himself blind; he was blind in ways in which he thought he had seen. Hymns of praise broke from him spontaneously—not in set phrases, nor with what he had hitherto called melody, nor

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with singing of the voice; but in an irrepressible gratitude. That nothing of the past was wasted was the theme of his ever-recurring song. To see evil pass into nothingness in the degree to which Dust theories were shaken off was like emerging into sunlit air after existence underground. Once he beheld the unity of life, the unity of purpose, the unity of good, his being became incense, viol, and harp, and he was ready to cast his crown before the Throne, saying:

“ ‘Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for Thou hast created all things, and for Thy pleasure they are and were created.’ ”

And within the vision of God he saw his wife and children—always busied in ways he didn't understand; always occupied on errands that had nothing to do with him. It was not continuously that he saw them, and it was not near, and it was not all together. They came to him singly, or in groups, or in glimpses. Such communication as he could hold with them was chiefly in a sense of well-being and of mutual love.

“You'll come closer to them by degrees,” he was informed by his guide. “It's a matter of perception. All things will be possible

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in the measure in which you free yourself from mortal restrictions."

"But what are they doing?"

"They're about their Father's business, as you and I are."

The answer both rejoiced and troubled him.

"I'm afraid they were not — or they weren't wholly—"

"When you as a Dream Man saw them as other Dream Men? No! But the Dream Man always misinterprets. The Children of Dust see each other as lying and cheating and hating and killing, and given over to every kind of wickedness and frightfulness. That is the inversion of what they are actually doing as the Children of Light. What puzzles you is that, in throwing off the dream, you are seeing those who are dear to you not as you supposed them to be, but as they are. Each one of them is doing his Father's business, positively and always, no matter what grotesque or hideous perversion the dream consciousness may try to fix in him. In the Reality there is no thwarting of the Almighty, even though mortals pride themselves on being able to do it." He added, gently and yet joyously, "Great is the mystery of being!"

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“ ‘And great is the mystery of godliness,’ ”
the other quoted, in his turn.

“And wonderful is it to emerge from darkness and half lights into the daylight of the Sun of Righteousness.”

“But blessed,” Berkeley Noone went on, fervently, “are they who, in half lights and darkness, are able to see that they shall emerge quietly, simply, naturally—and not be violently thrust into glories or terrors they cannot understand.

“More blessed are they who learn to live in God as in the One Vast Certainty—which created every one, and supplies every one, and upholds every one, and defends every one, and loves every one; and does it all with unlimited intelligence and might—‘to whom be glory and dominion for ever and ever.’ ”

“Amen! and Amen!”

THE END





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